

## V.

NOTICES (1) OF A BRONZE CENSER (?) OR CHAFING-DISH, FOUND NEAR BALVENY CASTLE, AND (2) OF A FIND OF COINS IN THE PARISH OF MORTLACH. BY W. CRAMOND, LL.D., CULLEN, F.S.A.ScOT.

*Bronze Censer or Chafing-Dish.*—About four years ago the bronze article which is now submitted to this meeting was found near Balveny Castle, parish of Mortlach, Banffshire. It was observed projecting from the ground at the foot of the slope forming the outer bank of the old moat, about 20 or 30 yards west of the great wall of the castle. As will be seen from its representation in fig. 1, it is a shallow vessel of bronze or brass, standing on a foot-stalk, circular in shape, over 6 inches in diameter at the mouth, and weighs about two pounds. On each side is a small circular aperture, one-fourth of an inch in diameter, through

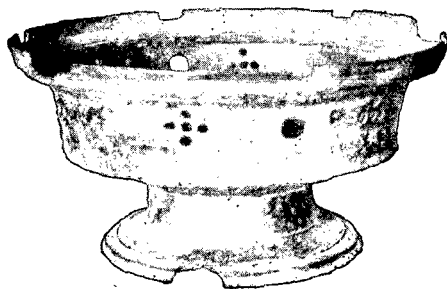


Fig. 1. Vessel of bronze or brass, found near Balveny Castle, Banffshire. ( $\frac{1}{3}$ .)

which chains may have passed for suspension. Around the circumference are six sets of small openings, apparently for the admission of air, each set consisting of five openings, arranged in the form of a cross. The upper rim has six indentations, to correspond, it is supposed, with projections in the cover. The cover, however, has not been discovered. The only conjectures that have been made as to its probable use are that it may have been a censer, or a brazier for burning charcoal. It may be added that the ancient church of Mortlach is a considerable

distance from the castle, but it is not improbable that there was a chapel in connection with the castle in pre-Reformation times. The article is now the property of the Catholic Church, Dufftown.

*Finds of Coins at Mortlach.*—Tradition assigns a remote antiquity to Mortlach as the seat of a bishopric antecedent to that of Aberdeen; but the true character of the early charters in the Register of the Bishopric of Aberdeen being now admitted, Mortlach has been shorn of its ancient glory. Its holy wells are as much appreciated as ever they were, but it is for a different reason.

From time to time Roman and other coins have been found in this locality, all tending to support its reputation for antiquity. Many of those discovered of late years have again disappeared, and the following notes have therefore been drawn up to anticipate the disappearance of others.

Last July two small copper coins were found at Pittyvaich House: one now, I understand, in the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries, Edinburgh, was identified by the authorities of the British Museum as a coin of Marcus Aurelius, A.D. 160–180; the other as having been struck at Alexandria in the middle of the third century.

A copper coin now submitted and presented to the Museum was found a year or two ago at Dufftown. It is a coin of Antoninus Pius, A.D. 138, and weighs 210 grains. On the obverse is the head of the Emperor, with the legend "Armenia." On the reverse is a Roman soldier, with the letters S.C., the rest being illegible. One meets with few Roman coins so old as this. Of those we have recently seen, the best is a gold coin of Vespasian (A.D. 69–79), found at Inverurie, and now in the possession of Mr Tait.

The next coin here submitted belongs to the reign of Maximinus, *c.* A.D. 236. It is of copper, and weighs 140 grains, but the inscription is almost illegible.

Another coin from the district is a bronze coin of Byzantium, of the later period, of an irregular shape, the cross very distinct, but the inscription illegible. Weight, 120 grains. By favour of Mr John Shand, teacher, Mortlach, I am enabled to present to the Museum the two coins last described.

There is here also exhibited a silver penny of Henry III. (1216-1272), which was found a few years ago in the manse garden of Mortlach, and is now presented to the Museum by the parish minister—Rev. J. B. Cumming.

The chief "finds" of coins in the parish in recent years were those made in 1877 and 1879 by workmen digging for sand in the sandpit of Pittyvaich. The coins were close under the surface, and at two different parts of the sandpit. Over the top of one lot was a stone, now lost, with the inscription "M & W," and some figures cut thereon. One of the "finds" consisted of seven large silver coins larger than a crown, and four somewhat smaller than a florin. Report has it that there was also a "goupenfu" of small silver pieces, but I have been unable to discover any trace of these. There were certainly some small silver pieces found in riddling the sand, but they have all disappeared. Of the large pieces, the whereabouts of four is known, and that, I believe, is all that can now be traced. There is good authority for believing that the wife of Alexander Duff of Keithmore, ancestor of the Duke of Fife, hid her treasures in troublous times, some two centuries ago, close to a burnside in Mortlach, and the very spot is still pointed out. It was therefore naturally concluded that this was a similar case, especially seeing that the coins seemed to be of about the same period, and some of them, moreover, were Spanish dollars, which fitted in admirably with the events in the lives of some soldiers of fortune belonging to this parish. One coin from the find which the writer lately discovered (and which is now submitted) bears a date which altogether overthrows this theory, and compels us to have recourse to a less romantic one.

Of the four large silver pieces one is a 40s. (Scots) piece of William and Mary, of date 1690-94. On the obverse are the heads of these sovereigns, with the inscription—GVLIELMVS . ET . MARIA . DEI . GRATIA, with "40" under the busts to denote the value of the coin. On the obverse—REX . ET . REGINA . MAG . BR . FR . ET . HIB . The next is a fine coin of Ferdinand III, Emperor of Germany, 1637-1657. On the reverse is the inscription—FERDINANDVS . III . D.G . ROMANO . IMP . S : A : , and on the obverse—1646 . IQ . NOVA CIVIT [STRAL?] SUNDENSIS. The next appears to me to be a coin of the Archbishop of Cologne,

Elector of the German Empire. It bears on the obverse—MAX . HEN . D . G . ARC . COL . PRIN . EL . , and on the reverse—CO . LO . HO . EP . ET . PRINC . LEOD . DVX . BVL . MA . . . . 1671. The last of the four coins is, I presume, a Bolivian dollar. It has on the obverse—POR LA CONSTITUCION, with the head of Bolivar and the word BOLIVAR, while on the reverse appears—REPUBLICA BOLIVIANA 1837.

This coin, then, of date 1837, and found in the sandpit of Pittyvaich in 1877 or 1879 along with these other ancient coins, compels us, for want of a more charitable explanation, to suspect that the coins were surreptitiously obtained and hid in that spot, but the spot could not afterwards be identified by the depositor, or circumstances prevented his calling for his deposit. It is extremely likely that the coin of Marcus Aurelius, though found at Pittyvaich House, was carted thither among gravel to that place from the same sandpit. The connection with Spanish history of one family in this county, and the well-known collection of coins and medals that that family at least once possessed, point the way to a possible solution of the mystery.

It would be very curious if it should be established that this sandpit of Pittyvaich, by disgorging its surreptitiously-obtained Roman coins and Spanish dollars, has been the means of accrediting Mortlach with an antiquity as unreliable as certainly did, in former times, the pages of Boece and the charters of the Bishopric of Aberdeen.

One other coin of somewhat old date has been found in Mortlach. It is a silver "shilling" of the Commonwealth, found at Recltich, and now in Elgin Museum. Its date is 1652.